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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 001368

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: KABILA REPLACES FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: Poloff Edward Bestic for Reasons 1.5 B and D

1. (C) SUMMARY: President Kabila fired foreign minister Antoine Ghonda on July 22, at the insistence of GDRC vice president Jean-Pierre Bemba. This did not come as a surprise, since Bemba told us seven days ago he was determined to replace Ghonda and his aides had hinted for weeks that Bemba had doubts about Ghonda's political loyalty. The new foreign minister is Raymond Ramazani Baya, a former journalist, minister and ambassador to France, who is well-qualified for the job. END SUMMARY.

Bemba Drops the Hammer

2. (C) GDRC President Joseph Kabila officially fired foreign minister Antoine Ghonda on July 22. GDRC vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba, head of the Congo Liberation Movement, had demanded Ghonda's ouster. Publicly and privately, Bemba accused Ghonda of incompetence. MLC cadres and MFA officials, however, had previously acknowledged in private to emboffs that Bemba felt Ghonda had become more loyal to Kabila than to Bemba, and that the MLC chief wanted to replace him. According to an MLC communique on July 23, Ghonda will remain head of the party's Kinshasa federation.

The New Minister

3. (U unless otherwise marked) The new minister, Raymond Ramazani Baya, had until his appointment served as Bemba's chief diplomatic adviser. Biodata follow:

--full name: Raymond RAMAZANI BAYA

--born June 17, 1943 in Beni, North Kivu province

--speaks fluent English and French

--comes from a Muslim family, ((C) but Ramazani himself recently told emboff he does not practice religion, has been a "bad Muslim" most of his life)

--studied politics, diplomacy and journalism at Universite Libre de Bruxelles (undergraduate degree in 1973); earned a master's in public administration/financial management from Universite d'Anvers (1974)

--early career: radio and television journalist, beginning in 1965; joined the state-run "Agence Zaire-Presse" in 1974, promoted to economics editor in 1977, headed AZP's Brussels office 1980-82, and became director of AZP in 1982

--govt. career: served as minister of information and propaganda, 1985-1986; later appointed ambassador to France (year unknown); allegedly killed two French children in a speeding accident in late 1996 (Note: He is rumored to have taken the fall for one of Mobutu's family members. End Note.); following a public outcry in France and an official request from the French government, the Zairean government waived his diplomatic immunity; in April 1997 a French court handed down a suspended sentence of two years in jail and a fine of FRF 50,000 (Note: (C) A French diplomat told poloff on July 23 that this background poses no particular problem, they will treat Ramazani as they would any other minister. End Note.)

--rebel career: went into exile when Mobutu regime fell; has been a member of Jean-Pierre Bemba's rebel Congo Liberation Movement (MLC) since 1999, serving initially as MLC representative in Paris, then as Bemba's diplomatic adviser

COMMENT

5. (C) Ghonda leaves with a good reputation in post's eyes. As for "loyalty," it is unclear how effective Ghonda could have been had he not gained Kabila's trust. The new foreign minister is well-qualified for the job, but is unlikely to have as close a relationship with Kabila and his advisers. END COMMENT.
SCOTT